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THE INFLUENCE OF COOPERATIVE EXTENSION WORK ON FARMING

A radio talk by J. C. Spitler, State Leader of Farm Advisers, University of Illinois, Urbana, Illinois, delivered in the Land Grant College program of the National Farm and Home Hour, May 16, 1934.

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My Friends of the Land-Grant College Radio Audience:

Not all of you who are listening to me are farmers, but there isn't one of you who hasn't felt the influence of cooperative extension work in one way or another.

For instance, you city consumers demand a milk supply that is free from contamination and otherwise of high quality. But such milk is not produced by chance. Before a bottle of it can be put on the consumer's doorstep, the farmer must know how to have his herd tested, how to manage his cows to prevent diseases, how to clean and handle equipment to prevent contamination, and how to produce and handle milk so that the product will be of good flavor and of high quality. Too often the consumer fails to realize this. Even more often he fails to realize that the production of safe, high-quality milk is a matter of research and education and that much of the all-important educational work has been carried on for 20 years through cooperative extension work.

But this is only one way in which cooperative extension work has influenced farming to the benefit of both the producer and the consumer. There is the matter of conserving soil resources as a continuing source of wealth for future generations. Here the influence of cooperative extension work has been immeasurable. Today farmers are studying their soils; using limestone, phosphate, potash, and other soil-improvement materials; growing millions of acres of soil-building legumes; rotating their crops in a systematic, balanced manner, and practicing other methods which conserve and maintain soil resources. In contrast, it hasn't been so many years that farmers in a State like Illinois thought that there was inexhaustible fertility in their soils and unknowingly abused and impoverished the lands. No matter what national or international policies are adopted for farming, a successful agriculture and a prosperous nation cannot be built on impoverished soil. If the United States is saved from the poverty and calamity of land impoverishment, much of the credit will have to go to cooperative extension work.

Equally important has been the influence which cooperative extension work has exerted toward reducing production and marketing costs and thereby widening the farmer's margin of net return. Farmers have been taught how to reorganize their farms, how to use higher quality seed, how to control diseases and insects, improve their growing and harvesting methods and otherwise shown how to cut down the cost of producing and marketing their output.

In the all-important matter of adjusting production of demand, cooperative extension work has been exerting a powerful influence for 20 years or more. Today, farmers of Illinois, for instance, are growing 1,413,000 acres more of legumes than they grew 20 years ago, and legumes --

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soil conservers -- have replaced many acres once sown to surplus crops such as corn and wheat. Some of these legumes, now among the most important crops grown in the State, were new and relatively untried 20 years ago. They would not now be grown as widely nor as successfully as they are and agriculture would not be adjusted even to the extent that it is had it not been for the influence of cooperative extension work.

Still a fifth way in which cooperative extension work has influenced farming has been in expanding the market outlet for farm products.

Finally, the most profound and the most far-reaching way in which cooperative extension work has influenced farming has been in the development of thinking farmers. Through extension work, farmers have learned that the problems of agriculture are constantly changing, they have been given the facts on those changes, they have been encouraged to seek additional facts and they have used those facts in thinking through their problems in a much more thorough and sound manner than most people realize.

In many respects the numerous influences of cooperative extension work upon farming are just beginning to make themselves felt. If the next 20 years of the work are as fruitful as the past 20 have been, we can be assured of a more stable and more profitable agriculture and a happier, more contented citizenry.